

# **2001 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

## **Risk Behaviors of Montana Youth**

### **High-Performing Schools vs. Low-Performing Schools**

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# **2001 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey Risk Behaviors of Montana High School Youth High-Performing Schools vs. Low-Performing Schools**

## **Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

The Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is administered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction every two years to 7th and 8th grade students and to high school students. The purpose of the survey is to help monitor the prevalence of behaviors that not only influence youth health, but also put youth at risk for the most significant health and social problems that can occur during adolescence. While all schools in Montana can participate in the survey on a volunteer basis, approximately 54 high schools are randomly selected to be included with high schools from other states for national data and reports.

The 2001 YRBS was conducted in March of 2001 with 7,655 7th and 8th grade students and 9,157 high school students. This represents approximately 31 percent of all 7th and 8th grade students and 18 percent of all high school students in Montana. Schools administering the survey to students were provided with detailed written instructions on conducting a random survey in their schools. To encourage accurate responses to sensitive questions, a strict protocol was implemented to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participating students.

## **Survey Validity and Limitations**

Data used in this report from the 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey are not based on a random survey. It would not be valid to generalize the findings from this survey to all high school students in Montana. It is only valid to attribute the results of this survey to the students who reported their behaviors in response to the items in the questionnaire. In addition, respondents in self-reported surveys may have a tendency to underreport behaviors that are socially undesirable, unhealthy, or illegal (alcohol consumption, drug use, seat belt non-usage, etc.) and overreport behaviors that are socially desirable (amount of exercise, etc.).

## **Survey Results**

For the purposes of the report, high schools were classified as being low performing or high performing. Low- and high-performing high schools were identified as those either having a low or high average math or reading score as determined on norm-referenced tests taken in 1999. A total of 10 schools were identified as being low performing while 11 schools were rated as high performing. The sample size for the high-performing schools was 1,098 students while the sample size for the low-performing schools was 501 students. Risk behaviors were investigated for each set of schools and the results are presented in the following narrative.

- **Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely to use tobacco products than youth from high-performing schools.**

Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely (44.2 percent vs. 29.7 percent) to have smoked cigarettes on one or more days in the 30 days prior to taking the 2001 survey.

Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely (21.4 percent vs. 14.4 percent) to have used chewing tobacco in the 30 days prior to taking the survey. The 2001 statewide average for high school youth was 15.7 percent.

- **Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely to have used marijuana than youth from high-performing schools**

Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were much more likely (39.7 percent vs. 28.0 percent) to have used marijuana in the 30 days prior to taking the survey than students from high-performing schools. Marijuana use in both groups of schools was higher than the 2001 statewide average of 27.1 percent for all Montana high school youth.

- **Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely to be sexually active than youth from high-performing schools**

Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely (38.1 percent vs. 27.7 percent) to have had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to taking the survey than students from high-performing schools. The 2001 statewide average for Montana high school youth was 30.7 percent having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey.

- **Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely to have been in at least one fight in the 12 months prior to taking the survey than youth from high-performing schools**

Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely (38.8 percent vs. 30.9 percent) to have been in a fight in the 12 months prior to taking the survey than youth from high-performing schools. The statewide average for all high school youth in Montana during 2001 was 31.6 percent.

- **Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely to have seriously considered suicide during the 12 months prior to taking the survey than youth from high-performing schools.**

Montana high school youth from low-performing schools were more likely (22.4 percent vs. 17.2 percent) to have seriously considered suicide in the 12 months prior to taking the survey. The 2001 statewide average of Montana high school youth was 19.4 percent having seriously considered suicide during the 12 months prior to taking the survey.

## Survey Conclusions

Results from the 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey related to high-performing and low-performing schools are mixed. While the survey indicates that high school students in low-performing schools tend to consume and abuse alcohol at about the same rate as students from high-performing schools, students at the low-performing schools are at a higher health risk in nearly all other categories. In several health-risk categories, low-performing schools far exceeded the state average. For example, marijuana use by students in low-performing schools was much higher than the state average (39.7 percent to 27.1 percent). In addition, students in low-performing schools were much more apt to have had sexual intercourse in the 30 days prior to the survey than the average high school student in Montana (38.1 percent to 30.7 percent).

The findings in this report indicate that effective disease and injury prevention information must be provided to all Montana youth. The data point out that many students (refer to statewide averages), including students from high-performing schools (refer to alcohol-related and smoking data), are above average risk in terms of their self-reported involvement in health-risk behaviors. While it is true that most Montana youth do not engage in health-risk behaviors (an exception is alcohol use), it is also true that too many Montana youth - whether they are from high-performing or low-performing schools - still exhibit behaviors that put them at risk for significant health and social problems.

Student health risks continue to be of concern to state and local school officials. Unfortunately, reported behaviors related to the risks of driving while drinking, riding with drunk drivers, suicide attempts, smoking, and alcohol and drug abuse have shown little improvement over the past seven years. A long-term, comprehensive approach to improving health and reducing risks is needed to provide Montana youth with healthier lives further removed from illness, death, and social problems linked to preventable health risks.

**Figure 1**  
**2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**  
**Risk Behaviors of High-Performing vs. Low-Performing**  
**Montana High Schools**

<b>Health Risk Behavior</b>	<b>High-Performing Schools</b>	<b>Low-Performing Schools</b>	<b>Statewide Average</b>
Had at least one drink of alcohol during the past 30 days (Q52)	56.6%	52.9%	54.1%
Drove a car when drinking alcohol during the past 30 days (Q13)	19.7%	23.2%	21.8%
Had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row during the past 30 days (Q53)	42.8%	42.9%	41.4%
Smoked on one or more days during the past 30 days (Q34)	29.7%	44.2%	28.5%
Used chewing tobacco or snuff during the past 30 days (Q43)	14.4%	21.4%	15.7%
Used marijuana at least once during the past 30 days (Q57)	28.0%	39.7%	27.1%
Sniffed glue or used inhalants to get high during their life (Q61)	17.0%	19.6%	15.0%
Had sexual intercourse during the past three months (Q71)	27.7%	38.1%	30.7%
Had been in at least one fight during the past 12 months (Q20)	30.9%	38.8%	31.6%
Seriously considered suicide during the past 12 months (Q26)	17.2%	22.4%	19.4%
Tend to think of themselves as about the right weight (Q76)	55.5%	49.4%	54.3%
Exercised on at least three of the last seven days (Q90)	64.9%	62.8%	67.6%

**Figure 2**  
**2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**  
**Risk Behaviors of High-Performing vs. Low-Performing**  
**Montana High Schools**

